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Little Red Flying-foxes Collecting Water in Fur

BY RICHARD H. LOYN¹

During a period of hot weather in January 1979 a flock of about 200 Little Red Flying-foxes (*Pteropus scapulatus*) was found roosting in 14m high River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) regrowth near Barmah Lake on the River Murray. At dusk the bats left the roost and began flying low over the water on a tributary creek, gliding and making loud splashes as they belly-flopped onto the surface. The heads were held high and did not touch the surface. By watching individual bats I could see that after doing this each would fly to a nearby tree, hang upside down and lick the water vigorously from the fur on its chest. I concluded that the function of this behaviour was to obtain water for drinking rather than washing as the bats did not appear to lick parts which had not already been wetted, and their movements suggested that they were swallowing substantial volumes of water.

It is well known that bats of many

species fly low over water to obtain insects or water. However, I am not aware of any reports of collecting water in the belly fur. Troughton (1973) mentions that fruit-bats "drink regularly, usually while on the wing; lapping the water as they glide over its surface." Perhaps this is a mistaken interpretation of the belly-flopping method. However, I do not know if flying foxes use the method regularly or only on hot days. The temperature had reached 45°C on the day of observation (5.1.79) and the bats may have been under stress (and in need of extra water); three dead ones were found under the roost. The most obvious food source was the blossoms of River Red Gums which were flowering nearby.

Acknowledgement

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¹. Mountain Forest Research Station, Sherbrooke, Vic., 3789.